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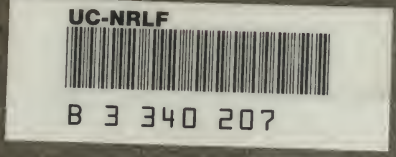

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# What is your Legion?

Grace Fallow Norton

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
Boston and New York

# WHAT IS YOUR LEGION?

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BY

GRACE FALLOW NORTON

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

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UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

## O SAY, WHAT IS YOUR LEGION?

My people, O my people, dwelling far and free!
Distance is your fortress, distance and the sea!

The sea spreads its waters — your thought fares forth and drowns,
And your memory of the old world and its burning towns.

Distance spreads its safety — your fear flares out and fades,
And you turn to your towns, your trains, and your trades.

My people, O my people, crying I come to you!
Nameless, a sign, a signal, — O listen! — and a clue!

For I come with songs, with prayers! With silence in my voice!
The hosts of fate are battling! The world makes its choice!

Drown not, drown not now, your souls in the safe sea!
Drown not your mighty love nor your old victory!
*Once we went singing, singing, singing "Liberty!"*

## O SAY, WHAT IS YOUR LEGION?

Once we were godlike, chosen! My people, sing again!
The old-world towns are burning. Their women stand. Their men

Stand and choose their legion, they rise and choose their life!
They march to terrible music, the music of the fife!

My people, O my people, whose towns the sea has spared,
O say, what is your legion? How has your legion fared?

And the music of your marching, — is your music surging shrill
Where the world rocks and shivers, uttering its will?

My land, eyrie of eagles whose wings beat by the sea!
When shall we cry to Belgium, "Our hearts are with you — free!"?

## PLEADING NOT FOR WAR—ONLY THAT WE BE HEARD

Give me words as clear as water, clear as light,
That I may plead the better for a Word!
Pleading not for war — only that we be heard.
O I would make you miserable and break your sleep
at night!

Not so far from Belgium but we may hear her
cry,
Or Germany but we must know her voice!
So if we do not answer it is because we lie,
Telling our false hearts falsely that we — the Free!
— can make no choice!

When shall we melt and glow? America! Soul of
light!
How can we live, so dumb, so hard, so shallow?
When shall a land speak out as a man would speak
for right,
Who says: "This is my faith! Let lightning fall and
the heavens follow!"?

## PLEADING NOT FOR WAR

O not so far from France but cry and counter-cry
Float through our windows! Yet we lift no voice!
But if we do not speak it is because we die—
Surely the soul of man is dead when it can make no
choice!

## O COME TO THE DOOR OF YOUR HEART

O come to the door of your heart!
Your servants would send me away;
They say you are sitting apart,
Counting your gold all the day.
They say your tills overflow,
That your bright gold rings and chimes,—
That its chiming covers so
The din of these warring times!

O come to the door of your heart!
Your servants would send me away;
They say you are sitting apart
In the pride of your peace all the day.
They say you are praising your peace
And that something within you has died,
For your soul is seeking its ease
And your body is satisfied.

O come to the door of your heart!
Your servants would send me away;

## O COME TO THE DOOR OF YOUR HEART

They say you are sitting apart,
Shaken with fear all the day.
Your fear is a terrible fear —
The fear of the face of the brute!
(Well it might show itself here
Where the pride of your peace has root!)

O come to the door of your heart!
I will knock there day by day,
For I know that you suffer apart,
Silent and sealed away.
I know you are stifled and sick
And you say you will not be well
While on far plains falling thick,
Rain bitter bullet and shell.

O come to the door of your heart!
For I know when you come you will say,
"I have seen here — sitting apart —
The truth at last and the way!
The pride of my peace has failed,
And my dread of the brute has died,
Yea, fear itself has quailed —
For my soul is unsatisfied!

"I stand in the door of my heart —
True Peace has been long away!

I am wounded, sitting apart,
So far from the worth of the day.
I will speak out at last and be whole!
My silence was all a lie!
For freedom I'll pour out my soul—
My body may live or die!"

## THE REASON

O I WILL tell you why in due season!
*France! France! France is the reason!*

For there the people, beating like surf against the prison wall,
Razed the Bastille, and hearing the prison fall,
Surged to the palace-gates, broke through, pulled down
The throne and took the crown
And crowned themselves and made a great democracy!
"Liberty!
Equality!
Fraternity!"

King Gold disturbs that equal brotherhood?
They struggled on through tears and blood!
They fell, they rose, they reach unto their star!
Republican, they hold the key
Of their own destiny!
And now, invaded, anguished, worn by war,
France shows the world what kings her kingless brothers are!

O Washington, who came to you, who gave to
you his hand?
Lafayette! But saved at last, a proud and power-
ful land,
We bring no banner, nor send the old cry ringing
across the sea —
"Liberty!
Equality!
Fraternity!"
Does gold disturb our true democracy?

Daily I ask myself, "What then is treason?"
*France! France! France is the reason!*

## WHEN LAFAYETTE CAME

When Lafayette came,
There was a crown in France.
But he was afire with the flame
That burned up the throne of France!

When Lafayette fought,
He gave us part of France.
His part was the fearless thought,
The great hope in the heart of France!

## MESSENGERS

In Washington, high, pillared, proud,
With its great gray dome
Like a swimming summer cloud,
Stands our country's home.

And there we send our messengers
And there they rise and say,
"Red fire sweeps the mountain-firs
And burns them all away;

"And the mountain-springs are drying
And the valley-wheat will waste,
And your messenger comes crying
'Protect the springs! Make haste!'"

Daily each messenger returns
But none has said to-day,
"Red fire across America burns
And eats her life away,

"And her soul's springs are drying
Of a strange, silent drought,

And your messenger comes crying
That the springs may gush out."

O many many messengers
Have come, but none to say,
"The soul of America, stifling, stirs!
Quench the strange fire to-day,

"Or light great fires will meet that fire —
Send clear and cleansing flame
High into the heavy air,
And free each healing stream!"

O many messengers have come
Nor yet are the springs released;
The drought that kills us here at home —
Not yet has that drought ceased.

## A MESSAGE, ONE ONLY

I AM no messenger, chosen, signed;
I must choose myself with my lone mind.
I stand on the street-corner, lonely.
But I have a message, one only,
And I have one question, only one,
Weighing in my heart like stone.

My message runs: *We stand for nought*
*While the great battle of liberty is fought,*
*While men and boys, beside a crimson sea,*
*Die for a dream of freedom and democracy,*
*Or for an armed and iron monarchy!*

My question weighs within my heart like stone:
*Why has no word been spoken, not one, not one?*
*Why has none risen like Webster in Washington?*

## AMERICA — 1823

In Eighteen-Twenty-Three Greece bled,
And one day Webster stood in our Senate and said:
"A little land, a belovéd land, struggles to free
Her fields from Turkish tyranny.
Her people send the world a prayer,
Dark with their hearts' despair.
I come to plead that the nation speak!
Shall we not answer when a land still weak
Seeks strength in freedom? Shall Greece fade forever,
And we, her eternal debtor, her learner, freedom's lover,
Be dumb, while Europe's ancient thrones cry out
They are threatened by the rags and rout
Of those who, dreaming, dream democracy?
So young in freedom yet, we too are weak,
But I say we owe it to our souls to speak!
'Words were a danger? Silence were best?'
I say speech suits our higher interest,
For we are pledged to life and liberty!
But if we dream kings on their carven thrones
Have rights divine to crush men with their crowns,

And if we deem plain men unfit
To speak in Europe's courts, then — and then only —
we should sit
Regardless. True, we are
Not armed, we have no wish for war.
But we have words! O wonder of a word
And power! By all the future to be heard
And by a world, torn, burdened, and at strife —
If we speak truth and strength, if we speak life!"

O young we were in freedom then and weak,
But the world, the future, heard us speak!
The words of Webster rang through Europe's strife,
For he spoke truth and strength, for he spoke life!

## OUR LIBERTY

THINK of man still unborn,
Part of a herd, held to the herd;
Swayed by the herd, his Self unstirred.
Then his Self sees faint morn!
Clansman, comrade now, by the choice of his heart,
No longer now an inarticulate part,
He bends not to his herd, he bows not to his clan,
He has been born at last, he stands alone, a man!

He stands, he learns, he lives! He strives with other men!
He bows not to the state — he is its citizen.
He bows not to the state, he crawls not to the king,
His friendship and his fellowship are a kingly thing.
He gropes, he struggles on, seeking to wrest a soul
From the blind great Whole,
From its dark ancient terrible control.

America, America, what is our liberty?
A fellowship of men, brotherly but free!

Who know this secret of the soul — that it must give
From its lone light and vision if it would grow and
live.
A friendship, a fellowship, of strong men and free!
Columbia, America, this is our liberty!

## PRICE AND PRIZE

Our freedom was not conquered once for aye;
Our freedom must be moulded every day!
O not an ancient war to wrest us from a king,
But a war to-day, to-morrow — immortal, elusive,
a-wing!
A war with the world's fierce powers —
Shall our souls win?
A war with the soul's strange fires —
War! War! Without, within!
A dream, ay, and a danger! The risk that must be
made
Is ruin! And a great price shall be paid —
For the price is life, life ever, over and over and
over!
But life is the prize and life's love, and the joy and
strength of the lover!

## THE BLUNDERS AND THE FAULTS

O THE blunders of old England
And the faults, the faults of France!
They are as faulty as we!
But there's hope for us, there's a chance,
With our kind of liberty —
The kind they have in England,
The kind they have in France!
We speak out stubbornly,
Without regard for majesty —
Just as they do in England,
Just as they do in France!
O hardy human liberty —
You were born in England,
And you grew up in France!

O the faults, the faults of liberty
And the hope and all the high glory!
They have fought for it in Russia,
In the red streets of Russia,
They have yearned for it in Russia,
(My people, even as we!)

But they have not fought in Prussia,
Not for years in Prussia,
They do not dream in Prussia —
Not yet — of liberty!

## GERMANY — 1848

Mourn! Mourn for the dead year Forty-Eight!
Muffle the drums! Toll bells! March not, but mourn!
Pour ashes on bent heads!
Toll! Wail! Cry out for the great
And tragic year that died ere it was born!
That died and brought no life,
But only desolate hearths and beds,
Empty places,
Set white faces,
Graves and fearful strife!

Mourn, mourn for your dead year, great Germany,
Great Germany!
For your dark Forty-Eight!
Mourn for that dear lost year, so great,
So brief, so black, so bright —
When your soul yearned for liberty,
When your sons sought the word that makes men free
And met and spoke their faith together,
Man by man, brother by brother,

And dared hard deeds, stood forth — and failed! —
Dying, scattered, as the bullets hailed!
Mourn! Weep and mourn! Not for that fatal stand—
The last within your land —
But for the faith that died! No flaming foreheads
more arose —
The gates of iron close
Upon the hope of Germany!

Mourn, then! Toll bells, cry out and weep,
Because your people fell asleep
Within a ring of magic fire . . .
They dreamed behind dream-flames
And built their world of dreams.
O wail and rend your garments and call!
The wall of fire is an iron wall
Raised by Bismarck's iron command!

Iron around a land!
And still, like children your people sleep.
In dreams they arm, in dreams they weep,
Stirred by the old desire,
Murmuring "Liberty!"
Iron-armed, iron-burdened, dreaming, they rise and
stagger — see —
Then they strike outwards desperately.

## GERMANY — 1848

O mourn! Cry out! Weep for the tragic, great,
Dead, hapless, hopeless Forty-Eight!
Mourn not because your faith failed then!
Mourn only that it never rose again!
O mourn like eagles for the clipping of wings!
Mourn like lovers for the death of the dearest things!

## BLOOD AND IRON

An iron land with an iron god
And no faith in man save under an iron rod
An iron land where iron rules,
Welded into weapons and into mighty tools.

An iron land with an iron will
And iron wisdom. Powerful, ordered, still,
Iron-minded, iron-handed,
As iron Bismarck commanded,
Printing his strength upon the state
Whose soul had faltered after Forty-Eight.
"With blood and iron!" stern Bismarck said,
"Thus the minds of states are made!"
("Liberty!" the patriots cried.
For this their blood, for this they died!)
"God-rights for kings!" great Bismarck said,
And so the iron God was made —
Welded, weaponed, a monstrous creature,
Iron of mind and iron of feature.
Iron and blood! Iron and blood!
Blood is its drink! Bones are its food!

With iron rule and iron order
It stalked across the Belgian border!
It spoke there with its iron tongue
And the knell of the joy of the world was rung!
Over the world every bell tolls;
Iron has entered into men's souls!

## FRANCE AND ENGLAND

They come with wounds and scars
From wrongs and wrongful wars,
Their hands not yet quite clean,
Their houses not yet ordered, white—
The houses that they build.
And they come self-confessed,
Uncovered, though their sins be seen,
Knowing it is themselves they fight
Always, on every battlefield.
They come with scars. But O they come
From chambers of free speech, the home
Of liberty! And self-scanned, self-confessed!
One is republican. The throne of the other
Grows as light as a little feather.
Her empire melts its bands
And binds itself by the warm clasp of hands.

They come with scars. But deeper than
Their wounds are burned their words of faith:
Magna Charta is bread of one and breath,
And one remembers still the Rights of Man!

## VAST RUSSIA

She comes with wounds and scars
From wrongs and wrongful wars,
And burdened by her dire autocracy!
But her peasant soul so passionate, so brotherly,
And her young noble students crying "Liberty!"—
Crying in prisons dark and vile,
Crying on the cold plains of their exile,
Crying in the mouth of death,
Dying for their faith!
Faithful they come, knowing no monarch stands alone,
Knowing that throne must prop and lean on throne,
Well knowing that the scepter of the Czar
Was weighted—weighted with an iron bar!

## WOUNDED

GREAT beauty falls upon our world to-day,
White beauty of the snow, cloaking the meadow,
The dark mountain, every branch and spray,
In peaceful radiance without stain or shadow.

And yet because of distant wounds, we see
Red stains — a blot — another crimson blot! —
Upon that breathless perfect purity,
For we are wounded though we know it not.

Our souls are bleeding unto death!
They falter! They are faint for breath!
They got their wounds in valleys far away . . .
They bleed upon the snow to-day
Because our brothers lie upon the ground,
Waiting with wounds unbound —
The brothers of our souls whom we have never
owned . . .

The brothers of our souls! Who are they? When
The cry is "Men or Kings?" our brothers answer
"Men!"

## WOUNDED

*The wounds of him who dares the battle*
*Are not more deep*
*Than his who hears the harness rattle,*
*The horses neigh, and hears the deep*
*Bells calling all night — calling —*
*And hears the steady footsteps falling,*
*And hears — "For liberty!" — the immortal cry!*
*And hearing, turns with a sigh*
*And puts his soul to sleep!*

## OLD KINGS

I HEAR you laugh! I hear you say,
"What is this talk of kings?
I face a myriad task. My way
Lies far from old dead things."

Yet over the sea old kings live on
Who break and change the hour,
Clothed and armored as the dawn,
Like young gods in their power.

For over the sea the past has risen!
With ghostly flags unfurled,
The Days of Old have burst from prison
And clash upon the world!

O you, whose hopes and ardors burn
For the myriad task to-day,
Your forward-facing earth must turn —
Fall back — make place — give way —

Must halt and greet the sheeted past,
Must answer ancient kings
Who charge with a mighty thunder-blast,
With hail, with fire, with wings!

## OF SHIPS AND THE SEA

Never again would I hear of ships!
The sea's a snare of black water,
Where we sink, we sink! Our bright flag drips
With brine of a horrible slaughter.

Never again would I think of the sea!
"Whose wife went down, whose daughter?
We lose but few!" And cautiously
We turn away from the slaughter.

(For that was a woman of Normandy,
Or only Denmark's daughter,
Or a child of Spain or of Italy,
Drowned in the snarling water.)

Nevermore need we speak of our dead,
Under the closed black water . . .
But we must tell how the bolts are sped
And plead for any one's daughter,

Lest we sink, we sink! Under the sea,
Dead beside Denmark's daughter,
Dead by dead children from Italy,
Our souls in the silent water!

## THE WORD WE REFUSE

AMERICA! Can you bend iron to your need, plunging it into the flame of your myriad forges, and when it is red as flame, glowing and most beautiful, bearing it to great anvils and smiting?

America! Can you pierce mountains, or cast them down upon the plains, or stalk across their heaving shoulders to lay iron roads from ocean to ocean, where smoking engines of iron plunge and thunder on their way? Can you scoop deep caverns in the body of the earth, where miners will move with their little lamps, glimmering to and fro after gold and copper, coal and iron? Can you send iron shafts towering to the clouds, high as the passage of eagles, and can you carry light on secret threads to illumine that utmost iron height? And lead mighty motion in a little wire, to spin and to weave on gigantic groaning looms of iron, long webs to wind around the world?

America! Can you pluck out the blind earth's secrets and weigh the heavy weight of the sea in

scales, and test in crucibles the substance of the heavens? Feeling a lack, can you learn a new thing? Or, looking down into your manifold mind, can you bring a new thing to birth, bending steel and iron — and the stars — to your need? Can you accomplish these marvels, or do you fail? Are your eyes clouded? Is your mind less than the mind of another? But above all, further than all, the iron of your mastery — does it master you? Have you loves and dreams beyond the splendid pageant of your visible roads? And do you know the weight and worth and substance of an idea? Have you still a soul?

O speak! Answer and tell that soul why then you are silent before the Iron Monster! For are you less than he, that you should worship him or bow before his towering height? Or, towering also, and knowing that you tower, do you feel strange secret kinship with him? The iron that encases and curbs him, does it close upon you? Have you too given a few princes undue power? Are you too loath — loath and unready — to free yourself? O what has your iron demanded of your soul? Wealth, arrogance of caste, submission, silence, the unbroken rule — do these grow dearer to you than speech and growth and change and the willingness, when the dividing hour and the demanding

moment come, to break the law and cast it back within the furnace, and melt and hammer it out anew?

Daily you choose, saying you choose not! Daily you choose, and by your silence you choose — Germany! The prayer of Belgium goes unanswered. . . . The invader deprives you now of speech, for he has ravaged the plains of your soul and holds its citadels. And his heel upon your heart is the secret love you bear him — your secret love for his great girth, his ruthless tread, his thundering voice, his monstrous appetite! Love of the Word-breaker keeps you from the love that asks your word. And you are blinded to the despoiled fields, the land made desolate, and blotted for you is the voice of bondage. Alas, America! Yet neither can you thunder forth your iron affection! For in your heart there flutters forever a ragged bit of red — flag of those sorrowing great German exiles who came to you so long ago, who came to you for life and gave you life. . . . And in your heart there flutters forever a tattered tricolor — red and blue and white! — flag of the First Republic — and of yours!

The soul withers in division. This silence leers, saying: "I crouch and wait to choose the victor!"

O false and evil choosing! For the soul's elect, though he bite the dust, and be stoned and dragged at chariot-wheels, and though he die a thousand deaths, still he lives, still he is victorious! But the idol, the master, though he triumph with all his horsemen and riders and his engines and his cannon, still, rejected by the soul, he fails!

*Iron to use you or iron to use?*
*For Belgium a word — to have or to lose?*
*What weight has a word — the word we refuse?*
*A cross of iron is heavy! Choose!*

## THE LITTLE LANDS

This is a black day for all the little lands and peoples,
A day of charred fields, of pillaged farms, of fallen steeples.
Belgium and Poland, alas! What hope have they now?
Their hope must all be broken like a broken plough.

Their hearts must be like broken bowls. Yet no tears fall,
For the tears they had for falling, by now they have shed them all.
And half of them are dead now, under the heaving earth,
And many of them wander since they were driven forth.

And Serbia and Armenia! What light have they
To lead them out in darkness, weeping on their way?
There are no words to tell their grief. All grief they have.
Their life has been a hard road to a stony grave.

'T is a black day of destruction for all the little peoples,
And false it seems to pray for them under safe white steeples!
If you have strength to pray for them, stand at last and seek,
Praying your own heart only, for strength to speak, ay, to speak!

## THIS BOOK

I saw this book in a dream.
I held it within my hands;
The cover of it was red;
I waited my soul's commands.
Red is the color of blood,
The color of brotherhood;
Red is the color of flame —
I saw this book in a dream.

I said, "If it is not true
I must take my shears and cut
Every false page out,
Else it would be my shame!"
But I looked and saw it was true
And I knew what I must do.
I saw it there in my dream;
The cover of it was red.
Red is the color of blood,
The color of brotherhood;
Red is the color of flame —
I saw this book in a dream.

THE END

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